Just seventy-five years ago Dania, an agricultural community which relied mainly on bicycle, horse, buggy, and a twice-daily train for its transportation, became present-day Broward's first incorporated municipality. On November 30, 1904, twenty-eight of thirty-five registered freeholders gathered in Dania's Seminole Hall to sign a charter calling for Dania's incorporation. (1) Officers included Mayor John Mullikin; aldermen S.M. Allsbrook, George Jones, C.N. Nilson, N.C. Pike, and H.T. Tubbs; treasurer and clerk Roy Roper; and marshal and collector Press Roper. (2) Dania was then a part of Dade County which extended up the coast to the St. Lucie River.

Accounts relate that Captain W.C. Valentine, a civil engineer with the Model Land Company, platted the settlement and called it Modello as a tribute to the Model Land Company, a subsidiary of the Florida East Coast Railway. (3) The town's name was changed from Modello to Dania to avoid postal mix-ups because there would have been two Modellos in the state of Florida. (4) Dania was chosen to honor early colonists, most of whom were of Danish extraction. (5)

After the Seminole wars, the joint tasks of clearing and draining acres of sawgrass and swampland to make modern Broward suitable for farming were just too tough for potential settlers who ventured down the Florida coast. James Ingraham, an official with the Florida East Coast Railway and its subsidiary Model Land Company, was concerned that upon completion of the Florida East Coast Railway from Palm Beach to Miami, freight trains and Pullman cars would have nothing to haul. Therefore, Ingraham encouraged groups of homesteaders to colonize the region by making available special discounted train fares, by offering rebates on shipments of furniture and household goods, and by promoting cut-rate land deals and free lots in Dania, still known as Modello. (6) At last, in 1898, twelve Danish families from Chicago made the trek to Modello. Yet, few could endure the hardships and rigors of pioneer living; thus, by the turn of the century, Modello was virtually deserted. (7)

Undaunted, Ingraham recruited Andrew Christian Frost. Frost, who was born in Denmark on September 30, 1847 and emigrated to the United States in 1873, had founded several towns in Wisconsin where he also had served in the state legislature. (9) During Frost's first trip to Modello in 1901, he encountered fewer than a dozen shacks scattered about a settlement devoid of any functioning economy. Recognizing its potential as an agricultural center, Frost became an agent for the Model Land Company and embraced the challenge of carving a community in the wilderness.

In 1902, after relocating his family to Modello, Frost founded a small tomato farm in the East Marsh from present day Federal Highway to the Intracoastal Waterway. Because of his foresight, tomatoes became the staple of the local economy.

An enterprising developer, Frost initiated the petition to incorporate the community as Dania and managed to recruit thirty adult Danes from Oconto, Wisconsin, to colonize the settlement. (8) Many of the pioneers whom Frost recruited were carpenters as well as farmers; along the eastern edge of the railroad track they erected a cluster of buildings which formed the core of early Dania. (10)

In 1902 Frost erected a general store which housed the post office of which he was named postmaster; (11) 1903 marked the founding of the Dania Methodist Church. (12) In 1904 a rocked road was completed to Miami and, in 1905, Frost constructed Dania's first school. (14) After a second story
was added, the building became Dania's first hotel. (15) Occasionally, however, town council meetings and church services were held in the structure.

Much to the chagrin of the townspeople, it was reported in 1907 that the incorporation proceedings had been improperly filed at the state capitol and in the Dade County Courthouse. Because no legal record then existed of the incorporation, a bill was adopted at the 1907 legislative session which recognized Dania as a township and declared valid and legal those actions of the town officials between the years 1904 and 1907. (16)

In 1910 the Miami Telephone Company was granted the right to operate a telephone line in Dania (17) and, in 1911, Dania acquired its first fire fighting apparatus. This was an Ajax chemical fire engine type number two, purchased for $250. (18) Six people were required to convey the engine to a fire.

As Dania became known as the tomato capital of the world, her farmers were hailed as the most proficient tomato packers in the nation. Dania grew so rapidly, in fact, that by 1908 there was talk of annexing Fort Lauderdale. In 1908 Frost published a letter in the MIAMI NEWS-RECORD stating: "Dania has five stores, one hotel, a stone church, the LaBree boat works, a blacksmith shop, Mrs. Palmer's bakery, Coultar's Jewelry, two lumber yards, one lawyer, a new cement block school, and a jail of the same. J.W. Mullikin, J.W. Bryan, and George Bloom had automobiles, pipes were about to be laid for city water, a bank was about to open, and the Dania Canal would be completed in the spring so boats can run up town. The citizens of Dania now contemplate taking in more territory next summer as far as New River. If the Fort Lauderdale citizens on the north side of the river wish to be incorporated in Dania, Dania will have no objection." (19) Fort Lauderdale did not incorporate, however, until 1911.

Hitching his old bay horse to a farm wagon in 1911, Frost took realtor R.E. Dye on a tour of the community and its environs. Recalled Dye: "The wonderful fields of tomatoes on the East Marsh looked like the long lost Garden of Eden. The John Mullikin and John Bryan Groves west of Dania were the show places of the County." (20) According to Dye, Frost's pet project was the creation of a deep water harbor at Lake Mabel, the site of present day Port Everglades. "Frost had a blueprint drawn up by competent engineers showing the harbor in nearly the exact location it now stands. That was in the days before Joseph Wesley Young promoted the development of the east coast's deepest port south of Norfolk." (21) Dye continued, "Frost passed away before the realization of his dream, a blessing perhaps, for some of his ideals might have been rudely shattered. He might not have approved paying $60,000 for a duplication of a set of plans he had carried in his pocket for years." (22)

Councilman, county commissioner, and mayor of Dania, Frost's son Martin Frost succeeded his father as agent for the Model Land Company. (23) Martin recalled that, initially, Dania had no packing facilities; all tomatoes had to be shipped by train to Jacksonville where they were packed and shipped by boat to New York. (24) The first two local packing houses were located in a tent operated by Chase and Company and in a shed of tar paper, stretched over poles, operated by Press Roper. (25) A packing house, later built by Andrew Christian Frost on the east side of the Florida East Coast Railway tracks, subsequently was purchased by Crutchfield and Wolfolk of Pittsburgh. (26) Even—

From rural backgrounds, the Danians were a hospitable people. This 1905 scene depicts Danians at a Sunday afternoon gathering in front of Webb Hotel.
tually, Dania had two canning factories and fourteen packing houses in operation. From his packing facilities, Martin Frost processed thousands of boxes of tomatoes under the brand names "Frostees" and "Love Apples." (27) The tomato industry in Dania eventually evolved into a multimillion dollar business.

On May 1, 1912, the Bank of Dania was established by Georgia's Witham Banking chain, headquartered in Atlanta.(28) The first paid employee, I.T. Parker, earned sixty dollars a month.(29) The Bank of Dania stood where the Pirates Inn is now. When the Bank of Dania occupied its new headquarters on the corner of Dania Beach Boulevard and Federal Highway in 1923, Martin Frost converted the old building into a real estate office. During the boom he sold it for $65,000.(30)

A group of local businessmen purchased the Witham interest in 1926, reorganized the bank, and renamed it "The Dania Bank."(31) Original founders included William S. Parker, I.T. Parker, Martin Frost, and A.J. Ryan, Sr. The bank was responsible for financing most of the farming operations in the city; in 1938, deposits nearly reached $900,000.(32) The Dania Bank remained on the corner of Dania Beach Boulevard and Federal Highway until it moved in 1956 to its present location at 255 East Dania Beach Boulevard.(33) Following the bank's relocation, the 1923 landmark was vacant for ten years until the city purchased it in 1966 at a cost of $17,500.(34) After plans by the Chamber of Commerce, the library, and a number of civic clubs to use the facility fell through, the city recreation department held some classes in the building.(35) In the late 1960's and 1970's, the Dania Arts and Patrons Society sponsored exhibits there.(36) The city realized a profit in 1973 by selling the building to Dr. Gilbert Bergen for $68,000.(37) The present occupant of the building is the Hollywood Music Company.

With a 1915 population of some 600 people, Dania was Broward's second largest municipality.(38) That same year marked the opening of Louis Brown's department store. The Dania Woman's Club, a civic group which had participated in community affairs since 1917, was chartered in 1923.(39) In 1924, A.J. Ryan, Sr. opened his real estate firm, which is believed to be the oldest agency in continuous operation in Broward.(40)

Dania's population soared to 1,473 in 1925 while the Florida boom continued.(41) and the famed Dania Beach Hotel, known as Florida's "beauty spot," was constructed by A.J. Ryan, Sr. on Dania Beach Boulevard at an estimated cost of $250,000.(42) During the heyday of Prohibition, Dania's Whiskey Creek was the distribution point for bootleg liquor imported from Nassau.(43)

For many Dania residents the 1925 Christmas season was not altogether a happy one. While Dania Hotel manager G.F. Turner was working over the gasoline stove, it burst into flames.(44) The blaze spread, rapidly consuming everything in its path. Mrs. C.N. Crawford, night operator for the Dania Telephone Exchange headquartered in the nearby Douglas Building, was alerted by Mrs. Turner's screams. Mrs. Crawford summoned fire chief L.O. Hansen and the Dania volunteer brigade.(45) By the time the local fire fighters arrived at the scene, the flames had devastated the Dania Hotel. Unable to retrieve personal belongings, all forty of the hotel's registered guests fled the thick smoke and escaped unscathed. Meanwhile, flames leaped thirty feet in the air, illuminating the countryside and attracting hundreds of spectators. The blaze was the most spectacular in the town's history. (46)

Mrs. Crawford managed to call auxiliary fire fighters from Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale by humping her switchboard until it actually became hot from the heat of the burning hotel.(47) But, attempts by visiting companies to douse the flames were hindered because their hose lines would not fit the thread of Dania's hydrants. Until a line was run four and one-half blocks away to the Dania Beach Canal, the one line of the Dania Company was all that was available. By the time the fire was brought under control, damages not only had reached an estimated $25,000 but most buildings in Dania's business district were badly blistered by the intense heat.(48) David Sokolow recalled that his department store suffered such heavy fire and water damage that he had to replace his merchandise.(49)

The only solution to the economic slump triggered by the fire seemed to be the positive action programs formulated by Hollywood founder Joseph Wesley Young. On January 8, 1926, by a vote of eighty-one to four, Dania residents elected to be annexed to the Hollywood corporation.(50)

Dania suffered another setback when the storm of September 18, 1926 slammed into the community. After the hurricane, which left the town in shambles, business in Dania suffered its worst slump in memory. To reverse the downturn, to erase a debt on the new Methodist Church, and to re-establish confidence in the community, Mrs. Anna Bloom, Mrs. John Gormley, Mr. and Mrs. Dixon M. Jordan, Mr. John Gregory and Mr. I.C. Williams staged Dania's First Tomato Day Festival on May 17, 1927, with the assistance of local residents (51) Because of Dania's global renown for growing tomatoes, the day was named in honor of the red, ripe, juicy fruit. It was from Dania that the first commercial carloads of tomatoes were shipped to Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Pittsburgh at a time when tomatoes were growing almost nowhere else.(52)
For years, Dania’s annual Tomato Day festival was Broward County’s premier celebration. Above, the 1950 Tomato Queen Betty Vain is shown together with television star Milton Berle and her attendants Wanda Perdue and Terry Tretola.
were discovered just south of the giant banyan tree. (66) In 1917 Hinkley sold the hammock to Brook, who renamed it Wyldwood. Resold in 1946, the property subsequently housed an assortment of businesses, including a restaurant and gift shop. (67)

As sales dropped and profits plunged, times became really tough in Dania during the Depression. Paul Thompson, who was elected a Dania councilman in the 1930's, recalled that "our salary in those days was seven dollars a month. Our first order of business was to do away with it and work for nothing. Since I owned the first push-cutting mower in town, I was put in charge of a municipal cleanup campaign. To make Dania look decent, I got out there and cleared away sage growing waist high and mowed a four block area smack in the middle of town. It was a mess." (68)

In the midst of the Depression, Verlon Burrell opened Dixie Cleaners at 140 North Federal Highway. He related, "I owned the first dry cleaning plant on the premises in South Broward. Back then, a pair of trousers was dry cleaned for thirty-five cents; a suit of clothes for sixty-five cents; a lady's dress for seventy-five cents, pleats were ten cents extra." (69)

A November 1938 blaze, which reduced a local packing house to ashes because "volunteers didn't have enough hose to put out the flames," triggered William P. Brook's decision to enter the local political arena and run for a slot on the city council in order to obtain allocations for updated fire fighting equipment. (70) Named chief of the volunteer fire department after it was reorganized in 1939, Brook declared that, when he took over "the department had one truck that wouldn't run, one paid man, and a hose that was full of holes." (71)

Although Brook and his corps of dedicated volunteers "didn't ring doorbells" for donations they managed, by "bumming a dollar here and a dollar there" and sponsoring fish fries, ball games, and barbecues, to fortify the department until its rating was on par with those of other Broward cities and Dania financially became able to assume its operations. (72)

The year 1938 saw Ted Thompson create a makeshift landing field in north Dania for his Waco biplane (73) and marked the organization of the Dania Chamber of Commerce. (74) With annual dues of two dollars, members were dubbed "boosters." (75) Following the outbreak of World War II, the Navy transformed the vicinity of the present day Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport into a major training facility. Part of the acreage utilized by the Navy was within Dania's corporate limits. (76) In 1940 Martin Frost erected the Katherine Hotel, now known as the Pirates Inn. This structure housed Dania's first appliance and office supply store which had been opened by Verlon Burrell at the close of World War II. (77)

Just east of the Katherine Hotel, which was located on Dania Beach Boulevard at Northeast First Avenue, was Dania's unique open-air post office. Demolished in 1957, the structure had no doors to the lobby areas. Dania's original post office, a corrugated iron building, had opened on July 7, 1897. Jacob Paulsen was postmaster. (78)

A feature of the Dania scene for twenty years, the Denis-Roosevelt Research Foundation opened in 1940 on the east side of Federal Highway at the Dania Cut-Off Canal. In addition to supplying apes for medical research, this anthropoidic research station housed some 200 animals including chimpanzees, monkeys, squirls, otters, bears, alligators, and elephants. (79)

Dania's fame as an antiques center began in 1945 when Mr. and Mrs. Willard Ely opened Ely's Antique Shop. (80) The 1948 construction of a water tank with a 200,000 gallon capacity replaced a thirty-four year old landmark which had been erected in 1914. (81) The Albert Marshall LaBree Jr. American Legion Post 304 was organized in 1949.

With a 1950 population of 4,500, Dania ranked third in the county behind Fort Lauderdale and Hollywood. (82) Although Dania was larger than Hallandale, Deerfield Beach, Oakland Park, and Wilton Manors, all four cities outdistanced Dania by the year 1973. (83) Broward municipalities such as Miramar, Pembroke Pines, Plantation, Lighthouse Point, and Lauderdale Lakes, which did not exist in 1950, also were more populous. (84) Even though it did not experience explosive growth, Dania was home to a number of fourth and fifth generation residents who were descendants of original settlers. (85) "People like to stay in Dania" was their explanation. (86) And, politically, Dania had not been dull. In a span of twenty-two years, Dania had sixteen city managers and eight police chiefs! (87)

On April 10, 1956, a tornado suddenly appeared above Dania. (88) As the twister swept through the city, classrooms were battered and partial damage was done to the roof of the old Dania Elementary School at 301 South Federal Highway. (89) Originally constructed in 1913 at the urging of Andrew Christian Frost, who had petitioned the Dade School Board to establish a school district in Dania, the facility has endured many additions, repairs, patch jobs, and name changes. (90) When high school subjects were added to the curriculum, the school's name became Dania High; and, while serving as a regional high school for the southern portion of Broward County, it was called South Broward High. (91) After it was vacated, bids were taken by the school board in the summer of 1973 for its demolition.

In the early 1930's Dania exhibited the aspects of a small, unexciting town. Pictured above are one of the principal grocery stores and Dania's only bank. Behind these edifices on the main street is the open field where hard fought baseball and football games were played.
Preservationists then banded together in its defense. In addition to sparring from the wrecker’s ball, they persuaded the school board to lease the building to the City of Dania for one dollar per year. Already a threatened historic resource, the old Dania Elementary School sustained heavy fire damage on April 17, 1979. (92)

An earlier fire in 1956 had destroyed the Dania community house; in 1957, the Dania open-air post office was bulldozed in the name of progress and, during the 1960’s, the Florida East Coast Railway depot was blown 100 feet off its foundation by a hurricane. (93) Surviving structures symbol of yesterday’s Dania include Andrew Christian Frost’s first house at 132 Northwest First Avenue and his second at 158 North Federal Highway. (94)

The infiltration of salt water, which pushed back fresh water with the channeling of Port Everglades; the straightening, widening, and deepening of the Intracoastal Waterway; and the construction of additional drainage canals into the Everglades ruined the muck on the east side of Federal Highway and spearheaded the gradual death of Dania’s tomato crop. (95) Pioneer Dania tomato farmer Elliott Chapman Edge came to Dania from his native North Carolina in 1908. Weathering insects, blight, floods, high winds, and numerous misfortunes, Edge once cleared $73,000 on tomatoes grown on a 110-acre plot. He claimed, “I didn’t retire. The salt water retired me.” (96) Most tomatoes in Dania now come from supermarkets.

To cash in on tourism, the Dania Jai Alai Fronton was constructed on twenty acres of croplands which, at one time, constituted part of the Harris T. Killie farm. The Dania Country Club replaced some forty-five acres of the Elliott Chapman Edge farm. (97)

The opening of Dania’s privately owned seaport, Port Lauderdale, occurred in 1965. A fourteen acre facility with dockage for four ships, Port Lauderdale is situated west of the Intracoastal Waterway, just north of the Dania Cut-Off Canal. (98) Designed for freighters less than 250 feet in length, Port Lauderdale’s opening heralded the beginning of Dania’s industrial growth. In 1967, Dania passed the two million dollar mark in construction.

Wedge between Fort Lauderdale and Hollywood, the City of Dania covers approximately 3,100 acres or 4.85 square miles. (99) Situated in the midst of a major traffic corridor, Dania is traversed by several major thoroughfares including U.S. 1, a major artery on its north-south axis, and Dania Beach Boulevard, a major artery on its east-west axis. (100) In addition to a number of parks and recreational facilities which include the Dania pier, Dania has a unique parcel of mangroves and wetlands to the east of Southeast Fifth Avenue and Gulfstream Road. (101) Because of its location, size, and quality of vegetation, these wetlands have received considerable public attention.

Averaging .9 feet above sea level, Dania, the oldest incorporated municipality in Broward County, was home in 1976 to an estimated 12,750 people. (102) A former agricultural settlement with the tomato industry the mainstay of its economy, Dania is now known as the antiques center of the south. (103) Featuring trinkets and treasures from the past, the shops lining Dania’s main street, U.S. 1, have generated millions of dollars in business. Dania’s tourism image has been bolstered by the Jai Alai Fronton which draws scores of visitors to the city every winter season.

Since the days of the first town marshal, Dania’s police force had grown to thirty-seven paid officers. The Ajax chemical fire engine rig has been replaced by a force of twenty-two paid firemen. (104)

The present city manager-commission form of government was established in 1946, replacing the mayor-council system. (105) In today’s Dania, the mayor is chosen from among five commissioners who are elected to four year terms with elections held every two years. (106)